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Meredith E. David & Fred R. David

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Are key marketing topics adequately covered in strategic management?

Meredith E. David^{a*} and Fred R. David^b

^aDepartment of Marketing, Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA; ^bDepartment of Management, Francis Marion University, Florence, SC, USA

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Most business schools have a capstone course called strategic management. Students in these courses are often required to assess organizations' functional areas of business, including marketing. Students determine marketing strengths and weaknesses of firms, and develop strategic plans for case companies. Students formulate strategies, make recommendations, and determine the expected marketing impact of those recommendations. Although marketing plays an important role in strategic planning, the present research shows that most strategic-management textbooks provide little to no marketing coverage. In study 1, a content analysis of six leading strategic-management textbooks reveals 10 marketing topics being discussed, although scantily. In study 2, a survey of 167 business students nearing graduation examines the relative importance of the identified topics in strategic planning. Findings of this research suggest that the capstone business course needs to be more integrative. Implications for business courses, faculty, textbook authors, as well as practicing marketers and managers are discussed.

Keywords: strategic management; strategic planning; strategy course; capstone business course; business policy; marketing concepts

Since the functional areas of business operate concurrently as a firm seeks to gain and sustain competitive advantages over rival firms, the capstone business course has historically provided an overview of key topics in the various functional business areas (finance, marketing, accounting, etc.) that are particularly useful in strategic planning (Gilinsky & Robison, 2008; Kachra & Schnietz, 2008; Thompson, Peteraf, Gamble, & Strickland, 2016). Marketing has been shown to be one of the most important functional areas in business in terms of strategic planning and organizational performance (Fine, 2009; Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008; Porter, 1985; Slater, Olson, & Hult, 2010). As such, marketing is an excellent surrogate to examine the extent that the functional areas of business generally are integrated into today's capstone strategic-management courses. This is an important topic to examine because criticisms have been raised regarding the usefulness of business schools and business education (David, David, & David, 2011; Starkey & Tempest, 2005). Therefore, the present research examines to what extent the popular capstone strategic-management course today provides business students with a practical, multidisciplinary, integrative understanding of business strategy (Arben, 1997; Rapert, Smith, Velliquette, & Garretson, 2004).

*Corresponding author. Email: meredith_david@baylor.edu

Evolution of the capstone course

In the late 1950s, the Ford and Carnegie Reports sparked a mass movement toward a required capstone business course designed to provide students with an integrative learning experience that showcases how the separate functional business areas are considered simultaneously in analyzing complex business problems and developing a sound strategic plan for the future of a given business (Gordon & Howell, 1959). The original capstone course was called Business Policy and the majority of the content was indeed an integration of the functional business areas deemed to be most useful/applicable in strategic planning (Arben, 1997; Gordon & Howell, 1959). The original conception of the integrative capstone business policy course, however, has diminished overtime as the course has evolved or been transformed into a much more narrowly defined strategic-management experience that largely ignores non-management functional areas of business (Arben, 1997).

From the 1960s through the early 1980s, the capstone course typically covered key topics in various functional business areas and showcased how the functional business areas come together to make up a firm's strategic plan for growth and competitiveness. However, from the mid-1980s through today, the capstone business course has evolved from a 'multidisciplinary business policy course' to a 'discipline-specific strategic-management course.' This evolution of the capstone course has been accompanied simultaneously with a growing chasm between (1) business academics exploring knowledge at a high level of abstraction and (2) business practitioners wrestling with strategic decisions that require an understanding of the interworking of each functional area business (Gilinsky & Robison, 2008; Greiner, Bhambri, & Cummings, 2003). Some, or perhaps most, of today's capstone business courses and associated textbooks place extensive emphasis on theory and research and provide scant coverage of practical and cross-functional business concepts, tools, and skills (Beninger & Robson, 2015; Rapert et al., 2004). A disconnect arguably exists today between management practice and business skills taught (David et al., 2011). To the extent that this disconnect is pervasive in the capstone course, assurance of learning objectives may be at jeopardy at some business schools, and criticisms related to business education may intensify (Gilinsky & Robison, 2008).

A key difference between the capstone business course and other business courses, such as marketing, is that the latter is viewed primarily in the absence of finance, accounting, management, and management information systems (MIS) factors; whereas, in the capstone course, strategic planning, exemplified through case analysis, is performed with consideration of all the business functions concurrently (Darian & Coopersmith, 2001; Kachra & Schnietz, 2008). It is imperative that students in the capstone course are knowledgeable, for example, of the value of marketing in analyzing a company situation and formulating a strategic plan; students should understand how marketing concepts and tools can enhance implementation of proposed actions, in conjunction with the other business functions to create and sustain competitive advantages. Many people would argue that in a strategic-management course, students should learn how to do strategic planning, which entails integration of multidisciplinary business skills. However, some scholars and practitioners suggest that the capstone course today has evolved too far away from being integrative and skills oriented to being single discipline and theory oriented – to the detriment of overall student learning.

Given the transformation of the capstone business course over time and criticisms of business education in general, the present research examines (1) the nature and

extent of functional area integration (i.e. marketing coverage) in strategic-management courses, and (2) whether the capstone course today adequately addresses the mission of 'providing students with a substantially similar integrative business experience' (Arben, 1997, p. 70). Specifically, a content analysis was performed on six leading strategic-management textbooks to determine the extent that various marketing topics are covered in the capstone course. Of course, it is impossible and inappropriate in a strategic-management course to review all the material presented in marketing (and finance, accounting, management, and MIS) courses; there are many subareas within these business disciplines, such as customer service, warranties, advertising, packaging, and pricing under marketing (Lamb, Hair, & McDaniel, 2015). However, to provide no or scant coverage of the functional business areas, in the capstone course is arguably counterproductive, since the strategy-formulation stage of strategic management, for example, must include a detailed assessment of how the firm is performing in all internal areas, including how well the firm performs its marketing operations. The findings presented herein suggest that the capstone strategic-management course should transition, at least to some extent, back toward its predecessor, the Business Policy course.

Common marketing issues in strategic planning

Although each functional area of business is important in a firm's strategic-planning activities, marketing is arguably one of the most important business areas (Fine, 2009; Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008). As suggested by Peter Drucker, the purpose of a business is to create a customer (Fine, 2009), and as said by Michael Porter, 'competitive advantage grows fundamentally out of the value the firm is able to create for its buyers' (Porter, 1985, p. 16). Similarly, several studies of managers from varying industries show that, although the functional areas of business are necessary to support business strategy, the domain of marketing is particularly important (Slater et al., 2010; Varadarajan & Clark, 1994). Indeed, a meta-analysis of 114 studies examining the relative impact of the functional business areas on firm performance revealed that marketing capabilities have the most significant effect on business performance (Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008).

In the capstone course, students practice strategic planning through case analysis; objectives and strategies are established for case companies with the intention of capitalizing on internal strengths and overcoming weaknesses (Porter, 1985). With comprehensive case analysis projects being widely used in strategic-management courses, students are often required to recommend specific marketing expenditures for the firm going forward in terms of advertising, promotion, pricing, and product suggestions (Bobbitt & Inks, 2000; Darian & Coopersmith, 2001). In practice, marketers provide valuable input in formulating, implementing, and evaluating strategies, and effective marketing can enable an organization's strategic plan to secure significant competitive advantage (David & David, 2015). For example, regarding strategy formulation, the following questions about marketing are often examined in case analysis in strategic-management courses:

- (1) Are markets segmented effectively?
- (2) Is the organization positioned well among competitors?
- (3) Has the firm's market share been increasing?
- (4) Are present channels of distribution reliable and cost effective?

Regarding strategy implementation, various marketing issues that may require students' attention in the capstone course are as follows:

- (1) How to make advertisements more interactive to be more effective.
- (2) How to best take advantage of Facebook/Twitter conversations about the company/industry.
- (3) To use exclusive dealerships or multiple channels of distribution.
- (4) To use heavy, light, or no TV and online advertising.

Based on this overview of the importance of the marketing discipline, we conducted a content analysis of leading strategic-management textbooks to examine whether the current strategic-management capstone course offers an integrative learning opportunity necessary of a capstone business course, as discussed next. Specifically, the content analysis examines the extent to which marketing topics receive coverage in strategic-management textbooks (Christ, 2005; Demoss & Nicholson, 2005); marketing represents an appropriate surrogate to understand the extent to which the various functional areas of business are integrated in strategic-management courses.

The results of the content analysis reveal that marketing receives scant coverage in most of the textbooks examined. However, 10 particular marketing topics were uncovered that receive some coverage in at least one of the strategic-management textbooks (Demoss & Nicholson, 2005). In a second study provided herein, we surveyed strategic-management students at 10 universities to ascertain the relative importance of those 10 specific topics in developing a strategic plan for a company. Consistent with the rapidly evolving shift in higher education to a paradigm that better facilitates learning (Elam & Spotts, 2004), the present research suggests that a redesign of strategic-management textbooks and courses is needed in order to enhance the learning experience, provide students with vital skills needed to become successful managers and marketers, and more effectively to meet assurance of learning objectives (Gilinsky & Robison, 2008).

Study 1: content analysis of strategic-management textbooks

To gain insight into the extent to that key topics from functional business areas other than management are integrated into strategic-management courses, a content analysis of the six leading strategic-management textbooks was conducted (Christ, 2005). Specifically, the content analysis focused on marketing coverage provided in the textbooks, as marketing is considered one of the most important functional business areas in strategic planning. After conferring with the three leading business book publishers, McGraw-Hill Education, Pearson Education, and Cengage Learning, six leading strategic-management texts were selected from these publishers. The current edition of each textbook listed below (alphabetically by first author's last name) was examined (Spiller & Scovotti, 2008).

- (1) David and David (2015).
- (2) Hitt, Ireland, and Hoskisson (2015).
- (3) Hill, Jones, and Shilling (2015).
- (4) Rothaermel (2015).
- (5) Thompson et al. (2016).
- (6) Pearce and Robinson (2015).

The textbook content analysis was completed in three phases using content analysis procedures similar to Spiller and Scovotti (2008). First, tables of content and subject indexes were examined to locate marketing topics and terms in the various texts, and exact pages in the six texts were reviewed to determine the extent of coverage of each topic. Two researchers independently reviewed each text, recorded marketing coverage, and categorized coverage into key marketing topics. The coding results had an inter-rater agreement of over 90%.

The two researchers' identification and categorization of marketing topics covered in the textbooks, and presumably discussed in strategic-management classes, most likely as a part of case analysis, revealed 10 marketing topics, as listed in Table 1. The topics include, for example, market segmentation/target marketing, product positioning/perceptual mapping, and pricing. Interestingly, the amount of total marketing coverage varied significantly across the six strategic-management textbooks, ranging from 5 to 23 pages, with four of the texts providing 10 or fewer pages of marketing content. As highlighted in Table 1, the David/David text had the highest percentage (6.23%) of pages (23) devoted to marketing, followed by the Hill/Jones/Schilling text (3.43%, 16 pages). The other four texts had less than 2.20% of their pages devoted to marketing, with the lowest percentage being for the Hitt/Ireland/Hoskisson text with 1.18%, or 5 pages. Despite data mining/data analytics becoming so important in business strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Dollinger, 2013), marketing research/business analytics were only covered in two of the six textbooks,

In addition, as revealed in Table 1, the amount of coverage of each topic collectively in the six strategic-management textbooks and ranged from 1 page (test marketing) to 18 pages (market segmentation). Other topics receiving the most coverage (pages) across the six texts were product positioning (18), product development (10), and pricing (10). The David/David textbook is the only text to (1) include coverage of test marketing and break-even analysis and (2) to include coverage of all 10 marketing topics. Actually, no other text included coverage of more than six of the 10 topics.

To provide a baseline comparison of the amount of marketing content, the same textbook content analyses procedures were used to determine the amount of finance coverage in the strategic-management texts. A comparative analysis of the total marketing vs. finance coverage in the strategic-management textbooks is provided in Table 2. Notice that across the sample textbooks, a total of 2.49% of the content is marketing, compared to 2.45% for finance. Also note in Table 2 that marketing received a greater percentage of coverage in four of the six textbooks. These results provide support for the appropriateness of using marketing as a surrogate for all functional areas of business. Specifically, the results of the textbook analysis suggest that the marketing discipline (10 marketing topics in particular) generally receive quite limited coverage in the capstone course. The results showed that finance received even less coverage and it is likely that functional business areas such as accounting and MIS receive even less coverage. Thus, it is likely that the current capstone business course may not be performing its mission of providing an integrative showcase of how the functional areas of business collectively make up a firm's strategic planning process and contribute to organizational success.

Overall, these results suggest that strategic-management textbooks are de- and reconstructions based on differing levels of observation which renders them incommensurable. Although there is no overarching measure of the quality of the textbooks (Gilbert, 2003), we suggest that those with more practical information provide more value to students and future practitioners than do textbooks that include more abstract

Table 1. Coverage of marketing topics in strategic-management texts (# pages).

	Textbooks								Total pages on each topic
	David & David	Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson	Hill, Jones, & Shilling	Rothaermel	Thompson, Peteraf, Gamble, & Strickland	Pearce & Robinson			
Market segmentation	4	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	11
Product positioning	5	1	0	8	4	0	0	0	18
Pricing	2	0	4	0	3	0	1	0	10
Test marketing	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Social media marketing	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
Advertising/promotion	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	5
Break-even analysis	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Product development	2	0	4	2	0	0	2	0	10
Marketing research	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Forecasting demand	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	5
Total marketing pages	23	5	16	10	7	8	8	63	
Total pages of text	369	422	467	467	366	440	2,531		
Percent of marketing pages in text	6.23	1.18	3.43	2.14	1.91	1.82	2.49		

Table 2. Comparison of marketing and finance coverage in strategic-management texts.

	Texts						Total
	David & David	Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson	Hill, Jones, & Shilling	Rothaermel	Thompson, Peteraf, Gamble, & Strickland	Pearce & Robinson	
Number of marketing topics	10	3	6	2	2	5	10
Number of finance topics	10	2	4	1	2	3	10
Number of marketing pages	23	5	16	10	7	8	69
Number of finance pages	26	3	10	5	6	12	62
Percent of marketing coverage	6.23	1.18	3.43	2.14	1.91	1.82	2.49
Percent of finance coverage	7.04	0.71	2.14	1.07	1.64	2.73	2.45

theory. Based on the results of the textbook content analysis, one can reasonably conclude that the strategic-management course may not be effectively fulfilling its integrative purpose of a capstone business course, especially at institutions where four of the six textbooks are used.

Study 2: survey of business students at 10 universities

To assess the extent that such scant coverage of marketing topics is appropriate in the capstone business course, a second study was conducted that examined the importance of marketing topics in strategic planning, as perceived by strategic-management students. Knowing the key marketing topics covered in leading textbooks as per the findings of the content analysis presented above, we surveyed current strategic-management students at ten universities to assess their opinions regarding the relative importance of those topics in performing case analysis.

Specifically, a survey was developed and administered to students at 10 different universities who were currently enrolled in the capstone strategic-management course at one of 10 randomly selected AACSB accredited institutions across the United States. A total of 167 students (46% female) responded, which calculated to a response rate of 24.6%, which is not unexpectedly low given that participation was on a voluntary basis. The 10 universities included in the sample are as follows: Baylor University, Dalton State College, DePaul University, Francis Marion University, Frostburg State University, Indiana University Northwest, Johns Hopkins University, Liberty University, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi. An online review of the business curricula at each of the 10 universities revealed that all of the schools have a required capstone strategic management course. While the

content analysis presented above revealed 10 marketing topics that are covered to varying extent in strategic-management textbooks, the survey of students nearing completion of their strategic-management course enabled us to better understand whether the marketing topics are actually relevant and useful to students in the capstone course.

The survey showed participants each of the 10 marketing topics identified in the textbook content analysis, and asked them to indicate on a 7-point scale (anchored with 'not at all important' and 'extremely important') the extent to which they feel that each topic is important in performing a case analysis and developing a strategic plan for a company. The order of the topics presented was randomized for each participant to account for any possible order effects. Also in the survey, participants indicated whether their strategic-management course included a semester long case analysis, and if so, whether the case analysis was a team-based project. In addition, we assessed participants' feelings regarding their ability to develop a strategic plan for a company after having had their strategic-management course by asking them to indicate on a 7-point scale their level of agreement that, 'After taking my strategic management course, I will feel very knowledgeable developing a strategic plan for a company.'

To examine participants' perceived importance of each of the 10 marketing topics in developing a strategic plan for a company, one-sample *t*-tests were conducted using the midpoint (i.e. 4, corresponding to 'neither important nor unimportant') of the 7-point scale as the test value. The results indicated that all of the marketing topics are considered by students to be important in developing a strategic plan for a company. That is, the mean importance score for each of the 10 marketing topics was significantly greater than the midpoint (4.00) of the scale. The mean importance score of each of the 10 marketing topics is shown in Table 3; the 10 topics do not differ significantly from one another in terms of relative importance. Simply stated, students find all 10 marketing topics to be helpful in case analysis and strategic planning – despite oftentimes having minimal to no marketing instruction in their capstone course/textbook. Although product development, marketing research/business analytics, and market

Table 3. Relative importance of marketing topics.

	Mean (<i>n</i> = 167)	Standard deviation	68% confidence interval	95% confidence interval	Relative importance
Market segmentation	6.01	0.92	5.09–6.93	4.17–7.85	3
Product positioning	5.79	1.02	4.77–6.81	3.75–7.83	7
Pricing	5.96	1.01	4.95–6.97	3.94–7.98	4
Test marketing	5.58	1.04	4.54–6.62	3.50–7.66	10
Social media marketing	5.64	1.11	4.53–6.75	3.42–7.86	9
Advertising/ promotion	5.83	1.09	4.74–6.92	3.65–8.01	6
Break-even analysis	5.78	1.07	4.71–6.85	3.64–7.92	8
Product development	6.06	0.92	5.14–6.98	4.22–7.90	1
Marketing research	6.02	0.92	5.10–6.94	4.18–7.86	2
Forecasting demand	5.95	0.86	5.09–6.81	4.23–7.67	5

segmentation are considered to be particularly important in case analysis (strategic planning), the textbook content analysis revealed that these topics generally receive very little coverage generally in the sample textbooks.

As part of this research, we examined the percentage of participants who were completing a semester long case analysis project as a part of their strategic-management course. The data revealed that approximately two-thirds (65%) of participants were completing a semester long case analysis project, and 92% of these projects were completed in a group. Case analysis projects simulate the strategic-planning process in organizations by placing students in the role of the decision-maker and enabling them to wrestle with real world constraints and incomplete information found in real business situations (Cravens, Lamb, & Crittenden, 2001; Elam & Spotts, 2004). Thus, it is likely that students who completed a case analysis as a part of their strategic-management course may have a better understanding of the role and importance of marketing in developing a strategic plan for a company. Indeed, according to the Harvard Business School, 'The case method is the best way to prepare students for the challenges of leadership.' Interestingly, the results of an independent samples *t*-test revealed that students who completed a semester long case analysis as a part of their strategic-management course feel significantly more knowledgeable about developing a strategic plan for a company than students who did not complete a semester long case analysis ($M_{\text{case}} = 5.98$, $M_{\text{nocase}} = 5.55$, $p < .05$). Coupled with knowing the importance of marketing topics in performing case analyses, this finding is an important testament for the importance of case analysis as a pedagogical tool that facilitates learning.

General discussion

The results of the survey of students nearing graduation with a business degree suggest that key marketing topics most relevant in case analysis (strategic planning) should be covered to some extent in strategic-management courses and associated textbooks. Specifically, students in the final weeks of their capstone business course, rated all 10 marketing topics as being important in developing a strategic plan for a company. These findings, coupled with the findings of the textbook content analysis that strategic-management textbooks have little coverage of marketing, suggest that the current level of marketing coverage and functional area integration in strategic-management textbooks is somewhat inadequate, especially at institutions using four of the six textbooks sampled. Among the six leading textbooks examined herein, the David/David text, which provides 23 pages of marketing content and at least some coverage of all 10 topical areas, may best address the integrative mission of the capstone business course.

Overall, it appears that the current capstone strategic management course falls short in fulfilling its purpose as a required integrative capstone course to showcase how the functional business areas work together simultaneously (Rapert et al., 2004). The mismatch between marketing topics covered in the sample textbooks and students' elicited need for such coverage suggests that the current capstone business course focuses perhaps too heavily on managerial theory and research – rather than being concerned with students learning how to actually do strategic planning; the latter approach incorporates more marketing, as well as all other business functions (Elam & Spotts, 2004). Assurance of learning objectives in some business schools could be compromised to the extent their capstone, 'integrative' strategic-management course uses a textbook that provides little to no coverage of interrelationships among the functional areas of

business as needed to gain and sustain competitive advantages in a firm (Gilinsky & Robison, 2008). Results from student surveys from 10 universities suggest that students would find coverage on key topics in marketing, for example, to be helpful and useful as they develop strategic plans for case companies. Thus, we suggest that strategic-management textbooks and courses be redesigned to provide a deeper level of coverage of key concepts, tools, and techniques from each functional business area. A redesign of strategic-management textbooks to include more practically relevant content and less abstract discipline-specific theoretical content would improve the student classroom experience in strategic-management courses. Thus, findings of the present research suggest a need for the capstone course to emphasize business practice (strategic planning) more and strategic-management theory (Agency Theory, Institutional Theory, RBV Theory, etc.) less (Kachra & Schnietz, 2008).

Should the capstone course be redesigned?

Generally, the stated purpose of the required capstone business course is to integrate what students have learned in all of their business courses by concurrently applying those skills in case analyses aimed at formulating and implementing effective strategies for case companies (Gordon & Howell, 1959). Unlike the original Business Policy capstone course, the content analysis presented herein shows that functional areas of business other than management receive scant coverage in most strategic-management courses. Consider the following conclusion made in one of the most recent full scale studies of business schools (Porter & McKibbin, 1988):

Unfortunately, for today's business school graduates, let alone those who will be graduating in coming years, the modern world of business is not very accommodating; it does not present problems and decisions neatly packaged and exclusively within a marketing, finance, accounting, or some other single functional box. The implication is clear: The manager of the future must understand more than a narrow discipline or functional area.

Students should leave the capstone business course with a knowledge base of business skill sets needed to enter and excel in the business world. This set of competencies includes being able to do strategic planning (case analysis) and incorporate marketing (and other functional area) tools, concepts, and techniques in the process. However, the results presented herein reveal that many capstone strategic-management courses are largely being taught without regard to important and relevant topics from other business areas. These findings highlight the need for strategic-management academicians to consider moving the discipline back, to some extent for sure, to what historically was called the capstone 'business policy' course that was indeed interdisciplinary and arguably provided graduating business students with more marketable skills (Arben, 1997). Marketing and management practitioners of business plead for more skills-oriented curricula, and thus would likely welcome a redesigned capstone business course as suggested herein (David et al., 2011).

Implications

A reasonable conclusion from the findings presented herein is that the capstone course at institutions using four of the six sampled textbooks is likely not providing students with adequate cross-functional integration skills necessary for effective strategic planning (Arben, 1997). The David/David text provides the *most* coverage of key topics in

the various functional business areas, followed by the Hill/Jones/Shilling text. In contrast, the Hitt/Ireland/Hoskisson text, in contrast, provides the *least* multidisciplinary, integrative coverage of business functional areas.

The findings of this research suggest a need for strategic-management faculty to provide real world examples to illustrate how key topics in the various functional areas of business are useful and important to consider in the development of a strategic plan for a company. Relevant marketing material, for example, could be weaved into strategic-management courses through the use of cases, videos, news articles, etc. Furthermore, the findings herein suggest that marketing (and finance, accounting, and MIS) faculty should interact with strategic-management faculty to discuss particular topics, tools, techniques, and concepts most applicable in the capstone course – so that prerequisite courses can better pave the way for enhanced learning in the capstone course. A more skills-oriented approach in the capstone course would expectedly facilitate students' transition into becoming actual business marketers and managers.

Given that most strategic-management students will have taken only the basic or introductory course in each of the functional business areas, key topics in each functional area that are useful in the strategic-planning process, such as the 10 marketing topics identified in this research, should be emphasized in those courses. For example, test marketing, social media marketing, break-even analysis, and marketing research/business analytics should be discussed more in basic marketing courses, given (1) scant (three or fewer pages) coverage in all strategic-management textbooks examined, and (2) capstone business students say these topics are important in case analysis. Even in introductory business courses, students need to be exposed to how key concepts in each discipline interrelate in making strategic-business decisions.

Consistent with the shift in higher education away from an 'instruction paradigm,' merely teaching students what the topics are and how they are relevant in their functional business area is likely not sufficient. Instead, faculty teaching the basic courses should facilitate learning by illustrating to students the importance of their respective discipline in the overall domain of business, as well as helping them understand how concepts and tools in that functional business area can be used to create a competitive advantage (Bobbitt & Inks, 2000; Elam & Spotts, 2004). As suggested by Spiller and Scovotti (2008, p. 79), 'rather than adding lecture topics, the equivalent of trying to put more liquid in an already saturated sponge, strategic-management concepts may be infused within existing course content.' Efforts such as these will help assure that the business curriculum is taught in light of real-world strategic business decisions that usually involve tradeoffs between limited resources across all functional areas of business. Actual business marketers and managers are well familiar with scarce resources and cross-functional considerations, so a closer simulation of that environment in the capstone course should lead to better prepared students entering the working world.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the extent that current strategic-management courses are fulfilling their purpose as the capstone business course to showcase for students how the functional business areas individually and collectively contribute in the strategic-planning process (Gilinsky & Robison, 2008; Rapert et al., 2004). Unfortunately, the current capstone business course seems to have evolved arguably too far away from the original mission and intent of the capstone course, (e.g. 66% of the textbooks sampled provide little to no coverage of disciplines other than strategic

management). Students expressed that more coverage of marketing topics would be helpful as they perform strategic planning case analysis. The mismatch uncovered between topical content provided vs. topical content deemed important was especially pronounced in four out of six textbooks. The mismatch is potentially problematic for achieving assurance of learning objectives and for providing students with marketable business skills as they near graduation. Based on this mismatch, we suggest ‘key marketing topics are not adequately covered’ in most strategic-management classes.

We recommend that the strategic-management discipline provides a deeper level of coverage of key concepts, tools, and techniques from the various functional business areas, as was done in the original capstone, integrative Business Policy course. A redesign of associated textbooks and course materials could provide students with more marketable skills as they near graduation and could ultimately enhance the value of their business education. In this way, the capstone course could better achieve its mission as an integrative course where students can apply functional business skills to formulate and implement strategies that can lead case companies, or actual firms, to gain and sustain critically important competitive advantages. We believe a redesign of the capstone course as proposed herein will be well received, not only by students, but also by real-world managers who desire business graduates to possess business skills needed for success.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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